

The Wyandotte Constitutional Convention: The Issue of Suffrage

Overview

This lesson explores the Wyandotte Constitution with respect to the civil rights of women and African Americans. Students have the opportunity to use a speech by a delegate to the constitutional convention as a primary source, analyzing it as a persuasive text. This lesson is written for one class period.

Standards

History:

Benchmark 2, Indicator 5: The student analyzes the Wyandotte constitution with respect to the civil rights of women and African Americans.

Benchmark 7, Indicator 2: The student examines different types of primary sources in Kansas history and analyzes them in terms of credibility, purpose, and point of view (e.g., census records, diaries, photographs, letters, government documents).

Reading:

Benchmark 4, Indicator 9: The students uses paraphrasing and organizational skills to summarize.

Writing:

Benchmark 4, Indicator 13: The student practices using words that are suitable, precise, and create imagery (e.g., precise nouns, powerful verbs, and vivid modifiers) (Word Choice: prewriting, drafting, revising: N, E, T, P).

Objectives

Content:

- The student will be able to identify who was given the right to vote in the Wyandotte Constitution.
- The student will be able to identify who could serve in the state militia according to the Wyandotte Constitution.
- The student will be able to identify at least three arguments that were given to provide voting rights to women, African Americans, and American Indians.

Skills:

- The student will analyze parts of the Wyandotte Constitution to determine who has the right to vote.
- The student will read a primary source for comprehension.

Essential Questions

- What civil rights were (and are) granted by the state constitution?
- Why is it difficult to gain civil rights if you do not have the political power?



Activities

This activity uses the following *Read Kansas!* cards:

- **The Struggle for Civil Rights When Forming the Wyandotte Constitution**
- **Minutes of the Wyandotte Constitutional Convention: The Remarks of William Hutchinson**

Day 1

1. As a class read **The Struggle for Civil Rights When Forming The Wyandotte Constitution** *Read Kansas!* card for background information.
2. Discuss the meaning of civil rights and how they relate to the Wyandotte Constitution. You will want to look at the Bill of Rights Sections 1, 2, and 6; Article II, Sections 4 and 23; Article V, Sections 1 and 2; Article VIII, Section 1; and Article XV, Section 6. You can find a copy of the Wyandotte Constitution at ksks.org/research/collections/documents/online/wyandotteconstitution.htm.
3. As a class discuss what group of people had the political power in 1859 in Kansas when the state constitution was being written. Is there a contradiction between “All men are possessed of equal and inalienable rights” (Bill of Rights) and restricting certain rights to “white men?”
4. Discuss the point that not all of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention wanted to retain the words “white” and “male” in the state constitution. Introduce the **Minutes of the Wyandotte Constitutional Convention: The Remarks of William Hutchinson** *Read Kansas!* card.
5. Have the class read the introduction and the first line of the first paragraph. In the first line Hutchinson says what he wants to achieve. Use an overhead of the **Persuasion: Support a Point of View** graphic organizer. The graphic organizer is designed to look like a six-legged table. Explain that when we write a persuasive text we must put our main point “on the table.” Write the main idea in the “table top” shape.
6. Explain to the class that in persuasive writing or speaking, the author must support his or her point of view. So we need to read the rest of the document to find the six ways (the legs that support the table) by which Hutchinson supports his argument.
7. Divide the class into six groups. Have one group read paragraph one, the next paragraph two, and so on. Each group is to find a supporting argument in their paragraph.
8. When the groups have completed their work bring the class back together. Using the **Persuasion: Support a Point of View** graphic organizer overhead to fill in the vertical boxes (legs of the table) with Hutchinson’s supporting arguments.
9. Use the information on the graphic organizer to summarize Hutchinson’s main point and supporting arguments.

Day 2

1. Have the students write their own persuasive speech to defend why or why not 13-year-olds today should be able to vote. Have students use the graphic organizer to help organize their own thoughts. Have them put their main idea or thesis statement on the “table” and then develop supporting arguments that they list on the “table legs.” They should come up with a minimum of three supporting arguments.
2. Check the students’ graphic organizers to be sure they are on the right track. Have each student write a one-page persuasive speech using his or her notes.

Assessment

1. Observe the students' ability to work with others to read the primary source document.
2. Evaluate the students' ability to write his or her persuasive speech.

For the Teacher

If you are using the textbook *The Kansas Journey*, the information you need for this lesson is on page 101.

Notes about using primary sources

- Historians use primary sources to determine what happened in the past.
- A primary source is a document or an artifact that was created at the time of an event or by a person who was present at the event. This makes it a first-hand account. Photographs, newspapers, broadsides, census records, letters, and diaries are all primary sources.
- Once a historian pieces together the events of the past through primary sources, he or she interprets those materials to tell the story of the past.
- When primary sources are edited they may contain bracketed words ([]). This may be done when the original word is misspelled. The word(s) in brackets indicates a word that was inserted by the editor.
- When primary sources are edited for length they will contain ellipses (...). This means there are words or sentences removed.
- When a primary source is transcribed there may be words that cannot be deciphered and they will be marked in a specific way (xxx).
- If a primary source is difficult to read and understand, try reading it out loud. This generally helps with comprehension.

Answer Key:

Main idea:

Hutchinson wants to strike the word “white” from the Wyandotte Constitution.

Supporting ideas:

- We are about to declare voting to be a privilege of color (race).
- Any group with control of the legislature can disfranchise any other group.
- The constitution is for all people in Kansas and there should be no separate standards for any group.
- We have written a document that declares all men to be equal and we should maintain that equality.
- We should not forbid the black man to vote when half of the free states allow it.
- Kansas can exercise modern ideas if we remove the word “white” from this document.

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Resources for this lesson are from:

- Kansas Historical Society collections

Name _____

Persuasion: Support a Point of View
Minutes of the Wyandotte Constitutional Convention

Main topic:

Supporting detail:

Supporting detail:

Supporting detail:

Supporting detail:

Supporting detail: